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**Rutland in the Civil War
(Part 3 – The Sharpshooters)**



RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*Lt. Col. William Y. W. Ripley, Commanding Officer
Company F, 1st Regiment, U.S. Sharpshooters*

About the Author

Robert Ranftle joined the Rutland Historical Society in 2009, upon moving to Rutland. He is a member of the Exhibit Committee working on the Civil War commemorative project of the Society.

This is the third quarterly issue that he has compiled and produced. The previous issues were: "Rutland in the Civil War", parts 1 and 2. See "For Further Reading".

Introduction

During the Civil War, Sharpshooter units were formed and became a major factor in strategy and planning.

Instigated by the War Department, recruiting took place in the loyal states for men with expertise in firing a weapon to become part of this concept for the organization of a military unit.

Candidates for the Sharpshooters were required to apply, and then to pass a stringent target-shooting test in order to be considered.

The town of Rutland was chosen as one of the sites for the qualification testing, and at the then-developing Rutland fair grounds a shooting range was laid out for that purpose.

In addition, Rutland supplied the army with a number of expert marksmen who went on to serve with distinction, including Lt. Col. William Y. W. Ripley, a familiar figure to Rutland historians, who was in charge of the Fairgrounds shooting qualifications, and later became commanding officer of Company F of the 1st US Sharpshooters Regiment.

Lt. Col. Ripley wrote "A History of Company F – 1st United States Sharpshooters 1861 – 1865", a chronology of Company F from its organization in September, 1861 until its absorption in Company E of the 2nd Regiment in December, 1864. This work is a cornerstone of the historical information base of the Vermont Sharpshooters. It provides insight into the lives of the Sharpshooters, both on the battlefield and off it, in camp and on the march.

This Quarterly issue presents and discusses these subjects in more detail.

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Rutland in the Civil War

(Part 3 – The Sharpshooters)

By Robert Ranftle

Who were the Sharpshooters?¹

From the early months of the Civil War, when it became apparent that the war could possibly be a long, hard struggle, the sides recognized that contiguous units of expert marksmen would provide great advantage in almost all battle situations. Precedents for this had been established in earlier wars, especially the Revolutionary War, when proponents included General George Washington.

The need for organized Sharpshooter units was more pronounced in the North than in the South, mainly due to demographic circumstances. Lt. Col. Ripley in his account describes the situation:

“Recruited mainly from the rural districts (for the South had but few large cities from which to draw its fighting strength), their armies were composed mainly of men who had been trained to the skillful use of the rifle in that most perfect school, the field and forest, in the pursuit of the game so abundant in those sparsely settled districts. These men, who came to the field armed at first, to a large extent, with their favorite sporting or target rifles, and with a training acquired in such a school, were individually more than the equals of the men of the North who were, with comparatively few exceptions, drawn from the farm, the workshop, the office or the counter, and whose life-long occupations had been such as to debar them from those pursuits in which the men of the South had gained their skill. Indeed, there were in many regiments in the northern armies men who had never even fired a gun of any description at the time of their enlistment.

On the other hand, there were known to be scattered throughout the loyal states, a great number of men who had made rifle shooting a study, and who, by practice on the target ground and at the country shooting matches, had gained a skill equal to that of the men of the South in any kind of shooting, and in long range practice a much greater degree of excellence.”²

¹ The main source for this section is: Benedict, George Grenville. Vermont in the Civil War. Burlington VT: Free Press Association, 1888.

² William Y. W. Ripley, “A History of Company F – First United States Sharpshooters 1861 – 1865” (Rutland, VT: Tuttle and Company Printers, Inc., 1883)

The approval to proceed with the formation of Sharpshooter units was given by the Secretary of War on June 15, 1861, and plans were made for the construction of testing ranges all around the Northeast. Candidates would have to demonstrate, in a target shooting test, a high degree of consistency and accuracy with a rifle or musket at the distance of 200 yards.

In the loyal states, movements began for the organizing of elite units of these marksmen. The Northeast region was a leader in this effort, along with the Midwest region, resulting in several highly effective units.

In the Northeast, Hiram Berdan of New York organized the 1st and 2nd U. S. Volunteer Sharpshooter Regiments, both subsequently attached to the Army of the Potomac. There were a total of eleven Sharpshooter regiments in the Union Army, five of which were attached to the Army of the Potomac.

All told, there were eighteen companies in the two U. S. Sharpshooter regiments, made up of volunteers from eight of the northern states: Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Wisconsin.

The sharpshooters were men of superior spirit and endurance, as well as shooting skill. The lists of their members killed and wounded far exceeded the general ratio of the army, which indicates the danger and severity of their duty. The service that they rendered was equal to or of greater value than that of any other equal number of enlisted men who took part in the war for the Union.

Sharpshooter Weaponry³

The government agreed to pay \$60 to each man who used his own weapon, or to provide a rifle. Furnished rifles were to be equipped with telescopic sights and hair triggers.

Target (personal) rifles were impractical because of their great size and weight, and also they would be difficult to supply (ammunition) in the field and would possibly be prone to malfunctioning.⁴

The weapon of choice for the Sharpshooters was the Sharps breech-loading rifle, with telescopic sights and hair triggers.

³ The main source for this section is Benedict.

⁴ Ripley 11-12



A demonstration of Sharpshooter techniques.

The government resisted procuring breech-loading weapons, initially claiming that the musket-loading Springfield rifles used by the regular army would be better, because these would not “waste ammunition”. This attitude was no doubt encouraged by the fact that the head of the Ordnance Department was the “father” of the Springfield rifle, which was then the standard weapon of the infantry.⁵

Then, once it was decided that breech-loading weapons would be required, the War Department selected the Colt revolving rifle over the Sharps rifle, with the promise to issue the desired Sharps at a later time. This created a near-mutiny in the ranks, with men refusing to take the Colts.⁶ (The anger was fueled by the fact that the government was slow to remit the promised payments to men who had brought their own weapons.)

In Ripley’s account, it is said that both President Lincoln and General McClellan took up the issue of weaponry for the Sharpshooters with the War Secretary, but were unsuccessful at getting the decisions overturned.⁷

⁵ Ripley 12

⁶ Ripley 13

⁷ Ripley 13

As a result of these disagreements, the first Sharpshooters entered training in March, 1862 with no issued weapons, other than some target rifles and smooth-bore muskets.

During the war, breech-loaders significantly outperformed muzzle-loaders in the field, which helped the Sharpshooters offset the superior numbers they were frequently up against.

Other Facts about the Sharpshooters⁸

Initially, Sharpshooters were thought to be “battle ready”. A few were sent into skirmishes shortly after arriving in camp, an approach which failed, contributing to the initiation of the training that helped make the Sharpshooters so effective.

It was decided that the uniform of the sharpshooters would be a dark green coat, green pants, leather leggings and a green forage cap. The knapsack would be “Prussian” style leather tanned with the hair still on, with a cooking kit attached.

Usually the sharpshooters were deployed on the flanks of the main force and ahead as skirmishers. Their function was to keep the enemy’s officers pinned down and to harass artillery and prevent their deployment.

Other problems were encountered by the Sharpshooters, that were not related to weapons.

- Delays in mustering (2nd Regiment) were caused by a snafu in the legislature. At the special session, called in the summer of 1861 to provide for the funding of all units that were being created, somehow the pay for the Sharpshooters’ enlisted men was not authorized. Special legislation was required to rectify the situation.

- Epidemics of measles and other diseases severely hampered training and thus the deployment of the Sharpshooter units.

- A train wreck caused numerous injuries to the men of Company E, 2nd Regiment, rendering the unit unfit for full duty for weeks. Some of the injuries were severe enough that the men were not able to return to service at all.

- On the battlefield, sometimes the Sharpshooters would run out of ammunition and would have to retire. Also, sometimes the Sharpshooters would be beset by “friendly fire” - short rounds fired by Union artillery units, using the crude mortar weapons of the times. On at least one occasion, these problems occurred simultaneously.

⁸ The main source for this section is Benedict.

The Vermont Sharpshooters

The state of Vermont made up a full one-sixth of the number of troops who would be accepted into the U.S Sharpshooters.

The formation of the Sharpshooters in Vermont did not get off the ground until August of 1861, with shooting trials that were held around the state. The Vermont units of the Sharpshooters were formed as follows:

Co. F

Mustered in 9/14/61. Organized at West Randolph by Capt. Edmund Weston, and departed for Washington D. C., under the command of Lt. Col Frederick Mears, and became part of the 1st US Sharpshooters Regiment. Subsequently, Lt. Col. William Y. W. Ripley assumed command on 1/1/62.

Co. E

Mustered in 11/9/1861, Organized at West Randolph and departed for Washington D. C., under the command of Capt. Homer R. Stoughton, and became part of the 2nd US Sharpshooters Regiment.

Co. H

Mustered in 12/31/1861, Organized at Brattleboro, and departed that same day for Washington, D.C, under the command of Capt. Gilbert Hart. Co. H became part of the 2nd US Sharpshooters Regiment.

Experience of the Vermont Sharpshooters⁹

Company F, having been organized first, saw action earlier than either Company E or Company H, both of which saw action first in August of 1862.

The first action that Sharpshooter units saw was during the Peninsula Campaign, at Big Bethel, at the Siege of Yorktown, at Chickahominy and at Hanover Court House. The Sharpshooters were heavily engaged in the Seven Days (series of) Battles, which ended the Peninsula Campaign.

With the Peninsula Campaign being a setback for the Union, Confederate Gen. Lee was emboldened to loosen his defenses around Richmond and move the fighting north toward the Washington area, in what became known as the Northern Virginia campaign, especially the Second Battle of Bull Run. The Sharpshooter regiments were engaged in this campaign, which was another Confederate victory.

⁹ The main source for this section is Benedict.

The fighting moved to Antietam, which was a tactical stalemate, but a political and moral victory for the North, as Lee's attempt to move the fighting to Northern soil failed, as it would a year later at Gettysburg. Sharpshooters played important roles in that battle. The Emancipation Proclamation was issued shortly after Antietam.

A series of major battles for the Sharpshooters ensued: Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg.

Although the first two of these were defeats for the North, the actions of the Sharpshooters in both cases helped stave off complete disaster.

Then, at Gettysburg, the Sharpshooters were instrumental in using delaying tactics to prevent the Confederates from gaining critical positions that could have resulted in a different outcome from the narrow but important Union victory.

The remainder of 1863 saw a number of battles during Lee's movement south through the Shenandoah, battles at which Sharpshooters played prominent roles.

In 1864, during the bloody Overland Campaign, as Grant attempted to flank Lee and move on Richmond, the Sharpshooters occupied critical positions, and paid a heavy price, in virtually every battle: Wilderness, Spotsylvania, North Anna, Cold Harbor, Petersburg, and the subsequent Siege of Petersburg that ended the war.

1864 was a particularly difficult year for the state of Vermont.

The Vermont Sharpshooters were officially disbanded on February 25, 1865. the remaining men were transferred to regular infantry units; many joined the 4th Vermont Regiment. Thus, they did not, as a unit, see the surrender of the Confederacy and the end of the war.

It has been written that the Sharpshooters were involved in every key campaign that was undertaken by the Army of the Potomac. A look at the record shows that to be the case.

Battles fought by the Vermont companies.¹⁰

<u>Battle</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Battle</u>	<u>Date</u>
Big Bethel, Va.	3/28/62	Auburn, Va.	10/13/63
Siege of Yorktown, Va.	4/5-5/4/62	Cedar Run, Va.	10/13/63
Hanover Ct. House, Va.	5/27/62	Brandy Station, Va.	11/7/63
Chickahominy, Va.	5/22,29/62	Kelly's Ford, Va.	11/7/63
Mechanicsville, Va.	6/26/62	Locust Grove, Va.	11/27/63
Gaines' Mill, Va.	6/27/62	Mine Run, Va.	11/30/63
Charles Cty Crossroads Va	6/29/62	Wilderness, Va.	5/5-7/64
Malvern Hill, Va.	7/1/62	Todd's Tavern, Va.	5/8/64
Rappahannock Station, Va	8/21-24/62	Po River, Va.	5/10-11/64
Sulphur Springs, Va.	8/26/62	Spotsylvania, Va.	5/12-16/64
Groveton, Va.	8/28/62	North Anna, Va.	5/23-24/64
Gainesville, Va.	8/29/62	Totopotomoy, Va.	5/30-31/64
Second Bull Run, Va.	8/30/62	Cold Harbor, Va.	6/3-5/64
South Mountain, Va.	9/14/62	Petersburg, Va.	6/16-20/64
Antietam, Md.	9/17/62	Weldon Railroad, Va	6/22/64
Blackford's Ford, W. Va.	9/19-20/62	Deep Bottom, Va.	7/27-28/64
Fredericksburg, Va.	12/13/62	Petersburg Mine, Va	7/30/64
Richards' Ford, Va.	12/31/62	Four Mile Run, Va.	8/15-16/64
Chancellorsville, Va.	5/2-5/62	Petersburg, Va.	9/10/64
Gettysburg, Pa.	7/1-3/62	Hatcher's Run, Va.	10/27/64
Wapping Heights, Md.	7/23/62	Boydton Road, Va.	10/27/64

Accolades¹¹

Possibly, the best way to show the consistent and significant contributions made by the Sharpshooters is to do so via the words of senior officers, including those of the enemy:

Yorktown

"The work of the sharpshooters this day was highly praised by General Porter, and their fire is alluded to in Magruder's (Confederate Commander) report as especially deadly."

"While here the first lot of 100 Sharpes rifles was received, and they were issued to company F, in recognition of its efficiency."

Following is the text of Gen. Porter's letter of commendation:¹²

Headquarters Porter's Division,

Third Army Corps. :

Camp near Yorktown, April 6, 1862.

¹⁰ Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers, during the War of the Rebellion 1861 -1866, Theodore S. Peck, Adjutant General

¹¹ Passages and quotes, unless otherwise indicated, are from Benedict.

¹² Ripley 25-26

Col. Berdan, Commanding Sharp Shooters:

Colonel.—The Commanding General instructs me to say to you that he is glad to learn, from the admissions of the enemy themselves, that they begin to fear your sharp shooters. Your men have caused a number of the rebels to bite the dust. The Commanding General is glad to find your corps are proving themselves so efficient, and trusts that this intelligence will encourage your men, give them, if possible, steadier hands and clearer eyes, so that when their trusty rifles are pointed at the foe, there will be one rebel less at every discharge. I am, Colonel, very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

FRED. T. LOCKE, A. A. G. (for Gen. Porter)

Malvern Hill

A member of the battery (McCarthy's Richmond Howitzers, opposed by the Sharpshooters) said to Lieut. Colonel Ripley, after the close of the war: "We went in a battery and came out a wreck. We staid ten minutes by the watch and came out with one gun, ten men and two horses, and without firing a shot."

2nd Bull Run

General McDowell in his report of this battle says of the Sharpshooters: "This valuable regiment was much exposed and rendered most excellent service."

Antietam

A monument exists at Antietam where the Sharpshooters held Confederate forces, which were superior in number, at bay repeatedly. The regiment lost 54 killed and wounded – almost half the men it had in the line.

Fredericksburg

"The Seventh Wisconsin and Twenty-fourth Michigan" says General Doubleday in his report, "led the advance, preceded by the United States Sharpshooters, and carried the woods in gallant style, taking a number of prisoners and horses." Most of these prisoners, who were of Stuart's cavalry, surrendered to the Sharpshooters.

Fredericksburg

"Company F was on picket in front of the heights the night of the 15th, during which Burnside withdrew his shattered columns. The

¹³ Ripley 55

sharpshooters were not recalled till just before daylight; but by propping up some dead bodies to represent men they got away, protected by a picket line of corpses."

Chancellorsville:

"The Sharpshooters thus took twenty officers, including the major of the Georgia regiment, and 300 men. This exploit has prominent mention in all the reports, and was almost the only redeeming feature of that disastrous day."

Gettysburg (2nd day)

(Refers to a movement by a force including Vermont Sharpshooters, which was intended to delay the southward deployment of Confederate troops along Seminary Ridge.)

"This was the first fighting of the second day and doubtless contributed to the delay of the Confederate formation for offensive operations on their right, to which delay the Confederate generals attributed their failure to end the battle that day in their own favor."

Kelly's Ford

"On 11/7 the regiment took part with high credit in the action at Kelly's Ford, which was an adjunct of the battle of Rappahannock Station. It there led the attacking party through the stream and against the enemy posted in rifle pits on the opposite bank. Captain Merriman was one of the first to mount the breastworks, and 506 Confederates were captured in them; most of these surrendered to the Sharpshooters."

Todd's Tavern:

(Refers to an effort by the Sharpshooters to dislodge Confederate observers who were stationed in trees at a great distance.)

"They (the Sharpshooters) opened with 23 rifles upon the tree-top from which the telltale flags were waving, and the latter came down with great alacrity. General Hancock, who watched this episode, complimented the Vermonters for their ingenuity and skill; and that night General Birney directed the sharpshooters to report to his headquarters as an independent command." (effectively a promotion for the entire unit)

Bowling Green:

"On the 21st, in the march of the army toward Richmond, the Sharpshooters dashed into the village of Bowling Green and liberated several hundred Negroes, who had been swept up by the enemy in their retreat and confined till they could be removed farther south."

The Fairgrounds Qualification¹⁴

The town of Rutland was chosen as one of the sites at which shooting proficiency would be tested, for acceptance of candidates for the Sharpshooter units. The Rutland Fairgrounds was the choice for the site of the target shooting range.

The Rutland Fairgrounds in 1861 had large floral and mechanic halls, a half-mile trotting course, a three-story high judging stand topped by a gilded statue of a Black Hawk horse, elevated viewing seats and associated animal sheds and pens.



ANGELA HINCHEY, RHS

Artist Rendition of the Rutland Fairgrounds, 1861

The opportunity to attempt to qualify was communicated to the public in various ways: public posters and newspaper advertisements, newspaper coverage and word of mouth.

The Rutland Weekly Herald of 1861 gives a fragmentary history of the competition for qualification held at the Fairgrounds in August, 1861.

Rutland Weekly Herald, September 5, 1861, p.2

“Orders from headquarters to hasten the enlistment of the Vermont Sharpshooters, with all dispatch, induce me to alter my plan of enlist-

¹⁴ The Rutland Weekly Herald

ment somewhat and permit each applicant for admission to the company, to make his trial shots in the presence of some reliable person in his own town.....

Each one using a common rifle with plain open sights will be required to make ten consecutive shots from a firm rest, at a target of 200 yards distant – in each case the sum of the distance of all shots from the centre of the bull's eye not to exceed 50 inches measuring from the centre of each shot separately to the centre of the bull's eye.

Each person attending the trial as attending witness will be required to enclose to me (Capt. E. Weston, Jr.) at West Randolph, Vermont, each separate target with applicant's name attached thereto; also enclosing letter giving style of sights on the rifle used in making the target of each applicant, age, height, general appearance, and statement as to morals and particularly regarding temperance habits.

My orders are strict regarding intemperance, and no one will knowingly be admitted who is in the habit of being intoxicated, and if any are found when in encampment, given to the habit of intoxication they will be promptly expelled from the regiment.

As there is another trial, let each one be sure he can make his target at any time or place."

Rutland Weekly Herald, September 5, 1861, p.6

"Capt. Weston of the Vermont company of Sharpshooters, was in town on Saturday, and while here accepted some ten or dozen men for enlistment. He informs us that he has already secured about seventy five 'dead shots', consequently there is a chance for only twenty five more, the maximum number required being one hundred men. Those therefore, desirous of enlisting into this company must make application at once, or it will be too late. Capt. Weston expects to be able to organize the company next week. Mr. J. J. Bailey still superintends target shooting in this village, on the Fairgrounds, where all the arrangements are perfect. He can also give applicants all needed information. Capt. Weston will be here again at an early day, and will give notice in advance to those already accepted, as well as to applicants generally, through the Daily Herald, that they may embrace the occasion to meet him. The captain made quite a favorable impression among the Sharpshooters. He put a shot within two inches of the bull's eye at two hundred yards with a strange rifle – the only shot he made while here."

Rutland Weekly Herald, August 29, 1861, p.4

"Among the Sharpshooters who have made a string of less than 50 inches, and some considerably less, are Chauncey Lamphere, Francis Richardson and John Thomas, all of Rutland. Their targets average less than 30 to 40 inches in ten shots, or an average from the bull's eye at 200 yards.

Mr. J. J. Bailey of Rutland, one of the Sharp shooters, on Monday last, shot a hawk on the wing with a rifle. The hawk was distant somewhere from 60 to 80 rods. Who beats this?"

Another story that shows the expertise available among Vermont men at the time is that of the Peck brothers, Harrison from Ira, and Charles from Wallingford.

"Early in September it was announced that a meeting would be held at the Fair Grounds, in Rutland, for the purpose of giving those who desired to enlist in the Vermont company in this regiment, an opportunity to make the required target and enroll their names for the war. The shooting was to be at a circular target ten inches in diameter, at a distance of forty rods, offhand, as it was called, or without a rest.

In the morning of the day set for the test, two boys, brothers, go down from the hills with a horse and buggy, and, after hitching their horse under the Meeting House shed in the village, with their rifles saunter down to the fair grounds, where they find a large crowd of people who had assembled to witness the shooting, which was under the control of William Y. W. Ripley, who afterwards became Lieut. Colonel of the Regiment. The rifles were heavy muzzle-loading target rifles, for at that time breech-loaders were comparatively unknown, and entirely unknown in the mountains of Vermont.

When the targets were in place and the distance measured, the elder of the boys stepped to the line and, carefully loading his rifle, commenced firing. The first shot was a little wild, but inside the ring; so were all the ten consecutive shots, many of them being almost in the center of the target. The younger of the boys then walked to the line, and, although somewhat nervous at first, he succeeded in placing ten bullets within the ring. As each shot was fired and the target master placed a black patch over the bullet hole, in the white target, a cheer went up from the crowd, which encouraged the boys in their efforts. A

¹⁴ "Vermont in the Civil War", VermontCivilWar.org/index.php

great many who desired to get into this Regiment attempted to make the necessary target, the most of whom failed, but a few succeeded.

A few days afterwards the order of Col. Berdan was modified so as to allow good riflemen to enlist in this company, and it was soon filled, the initial test having been found too severe for procuring enlistments."¹⁵but not, apparently, too severe for the two boys from the hills of Rutland County.

The Fairgrounds was utilized effectively in other ways during the war, especially as an encampment site for units which were undergoing training prior to leaving for their respective armies.

Rutland Weekly Herald, Thursday January 9, 1862, , p.4

Rendezvous of the 7th Regiment – "General Baxter has recently completed arrangements necessary for the comfortable rendezvous of the 7th Regiment. Floral and Mechanic Halls are filled with bunks arranged four tiers high on both sides, and also two tiers through the center of each building; the two buildings will accommodate 1,000 men. Two stoves in each room are amply sufficient to heat them.

Agricultural Hall being of the same size as the two halls above mentioned has been fitted up with dining tables, where the troops are to take their food. There are four tiers of tables running through it, and an addition has been made to the building on each side extending the entire length, eighteen feet in width; in each of which wings there will be two tiers of tables. These tables will accommodate the entire regiment.

Between the last named building and the Hay Scales, a new building has been erected 50' long by 20' wide, for cooking. There are four large kettles set in permanent arches, and large pans are provided for cooking meats, resembling ordinary sap pans of a sugar orchard. There is also a very large cooking stove for making coffee, and doing the finer sort of cooking. The cooking department will be under the direction of Mr. Hatch of this village.

The tents for these companies will be pitched today, just north of the buildings, to be occupied by the troops during the day only. Overcoats and mattresses were distributed to the men yesterday, made by F. Chaffee of Rutland, and well made too.

Gen. Baxter is deserving of much praise for the thoroughness and economy with which the arrangements above mentioned have been made."

¹⁵ The History of Ira, Vermont, Simon L. Peck, Charles E. Tuttle & Co., Rutland, Vermont. 1970. Pages 29-30

Rutland Participants and Roster¹⁶

As with all calls to service made by the Union Army, the town of Rutland enthusiastically answered the call for Sharpshooters.

Of approximately 600 Vermont men who served with the Sharpshooters, 24 hailed from Rutland.

Their names are:

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>		
F	Pvt	Bailey	James	J
F, E	1st Lt	Bronson	Martin	V
E	Pvt	Doty	George	
F	Pvt	Cutting	William	W
E	Pvt	Eldred	Henry	G
F	Pvt	Giddings	Edwin	A
F	Pvt	Hagan	Joseph	
F	Pvt	Himes	Edward	H
F	Capt	Hindes	Esbon	W
E	Pvt	Hodges	Sylvester	E
F, E	Pvt	Jackson	Edward	F
F	Pvt	Lanphere	Chauncey	R
F	Pvt	Mc Keever	William	
F, E	Pvt	Mead	Carlos	E
F	Pvt	Mead	Charles	B
F	Pvt	Mead	George	E
F	Pvt	Monahan	John	J
F	Pvt	Murray	Patrick	
F	Lt Col	Ripley	William	Y. W.
H	Pvt	Sanborn	Frank	A
E	1st Sgt	Squire	Daniel	W
E	Sgt	Squire	Willard	H
E	Sgt	Strong	William	K
F	Pvt	Thomas	John	W

¹⁶ The Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers

The following Sharpshooters were not Rutlanders, but are buried in Rutland cemeteries:

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>		
F	Pvt	Archer	Foster	E
F, E	Pvt	Giddings	Silas	
F	Pvt	Kellogg	Lyman	S
F	Pvt	Kimberly	Curtis	P
H	Cpl	Smith	Henry	A
F	Cpl	Trask	Edward	D
E	Pvt	White	Alonzo	

Of the 24 native Rutlanders, six were either killed on the battlefield or died of wounds received in battle, and one more died of disease. Six men were injured in battle, recovered and returned to their units.

Among Rutlanders, there were leaders, and those who gained distinction in other ways.

William Y. W. Ripley



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William Y. W. Ripley began his military career as Captain of the Rutland Light Guards (photo, left). The Light Guards volunteered almost to a man, and entered the Union Army as Company K of the 1st Vermont Regiment, of which Capt. Ripley was commanding officer. This was a 90-day service and Capt. Ripley left when his enlistment was completed. In November, 1861, he joined the US Sharpshooters with the rank of Lt. Col. and was installed as commanding officer of Company F, 1st US Sharpshooters. Lt. Col. Ripley led the company during the Peninsula Campaign, and was wounded severely at the Battle of Malvern Hill. For his performance and valor during that action, he was awarded the Medal of Honor. Lt. Col. Ripley was offered a promotion to full Colonel and command of the 10th Regiment, but his wounds were too severe, and he retired from the service on 8/6/62.

The following two Rutlanders were members of Company F, and attained high rank within the company.

Esbon Wiltsey Hindes



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Captain Hindes entered the service at the age of 22, and in less than two years had been promoted 3 times to the rank of Captain. He was the commanding officer of a much depleted Co. F at the Battle of Gettysburg. His unit was part of the force that earned honors by delaying the Confederate deployment of its battle line. Captain Hindes left the service due to disability late in 1863.

Martin van Buren Bronson



VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1st Lieutenant Bronson served first with Co. K, 1st Regiment and, upon the formation of Company F, 1st USSS, he was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant, 3rd in command of the company. Upon the injury and retirement of Lt. Col. Ripley, Lt. Bronson was promoted to 1st Lieutenant, 2nd in command. Lieut. Bronson was also instrumental in recruiting. During the summer of 1862, Lieut. Bronson was detached for recruiting back in Vermont, an assignment that yielded 50 new sharpshooters for the unit.

Charles B. Mead



RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Charles Mead mustered into Co. F of the 1st USSS in September, 1862. He was killed in action at Petersburg, Virginia on June 17, 1864. Charles was a prolific writer; much of the historical content that exists for the Rutland Sharpshooters comes from the diaries that Charles maintained throughout his service.

Of Charles Mead, Lt. Col. Ripley writes: "He was a young man of rare promise, and his early death brought sadness, not only to his comrades in the field, but to a large circle of friends at home."¹⁷

(Three RHS Quarterlies have featured the writings of Charles Mead, both for his experiences with Company F, and as a young free-spirited writer. See For Further Reading.)

Carlos Eugene Mead



VERMONT CIVIL WAR.ORG

Carlos Eugene Mead, brother to Charles, was only 17 years of age when he entered the service. He was wounded twice in combat, at Kelly's Ford in 1863 and again on September 11, 1864. He witnessed the death of his brother Charles at Petersburg and, just days later, was taken prisoner at Weldon Railroad. He re-enlisted in September, 1864 and served to the conclusion of the War, finally leaving the service in June, 1865

The Meads were friends with the Peck brothers (the young men who excelled in the shooting qualifications). Charles Mead and Charles Peck corresponded before the war, exchanging ideas on issues of the day, including the impending war.

¹⁷ Ripley 186

The Story of Company F¹⁸

William Y. W. Ripley wrote "A History of Company F – 1st United States Sharpshooters 1861 – 1865", which was published in 1883. This work is also known in archives as "Vermont Riflemen in the War for the Union".

G. G. Benedict has taken much of his information about the Sharpshooters from Ripley's work, and Ripley states that part of his purpose was to provide information to Benedict, who was the official state historian at the time.

Ripley also notes that his work is in part based on the writings (diaries) of Charles Mead.

Company F had more Rutland men than did the other Vermont Sharpshooter units; of the 24 Sharpshooter recruits whose residence was Rutland, 17 first reported for duty with Company F. (Three of these men went on to serve in Company E when Company F was disbanded in December, 1864.)

Much of the information in Ripley's book has been covered in other sections of this Quarterly.

Lt. Col. Ripley's narration painted a vivid picture of a sharpshooter's life during the Civil War.

Battlefield Experiences of Company F

Locust Grove and Mine Run:

It was not uncommon for battles to be fought on the spur of the moment. Similarly, sometimes battles that were anticipated and planned-for did not take place. Such was the case with Locust Grove and Mine Run, which were separated by just three days.

At Locust Grove, the 3rd Corps was diverted "by a mistake of roads and sundry other unfortunate errors of judgment", and ran into Ewell's Corps of Confederates, and were engaged in a "brisk fight", which lasted the remaining hours of daylight. Company F that day lost 5 men killed and wounded. The 3rd Corps lost 1,500 men.

Just 3 days later, Company F went into position at Mine Run, which had been the objective all along. For three days the unit was, at first, the advance guard seeing limited action and, secondly, the rear guard for the corps as it left the battlefield, the position of the enemy being too entrenched to risk serious confrontation. During this time the men endured cold, hunger and other hardships, while waiting for or-

¹⁸ The main source for this section is Ripley.

ders. Lt. Col. Ripley describes the experience in this relatively non-combative situation (Mine Run): "On many occasions they had more severe fighting and had often to mourn the loss of tried and true comrades; but never before or after did the company, as a whole, have to undergo so much severe suffering as on this occasion."

Thus, within a few days' time, Company F experienced heavy losses by being unintentionally diverted, on their way to the site of a major battle which did not materialize, and at which they were subject to uncommon suffering and deprivation.

The Seven Days Battle:

Deprivation was often a foe as well as the enemy. The Seven Days Battle began for Company F by being sent out to confront the enemy without having taken food, and with light provisions. Through the entire period of six battles in seven days, they had hardly any food and even water was scarce.

On July 29, 1862, the unit procured a single box of hard bread. Ripley describes the experience: "At this point a single box of hard bread was procured from the cook in charge of a wagon conveying the mess kit of the officers of a battery; this was the only issue of rations made to the regiment from the morning of the 25th of June until they arrived at Harrison's Landing on the 2nd of July." Foraging became the order of the day.

To make matters worse, there was hardly any water available: "To add to their discomforts the only water procurable was that from a well nearby which was said to have been poisoned by the flying (sic) owner of the plantation; his absence, with that of every living thing upon the place, made it impossible to apply the usual and proper test, that of compelling the suspected parties to, themselves, drink heartily of the water. A guard was therefore placed over the well, and the thirsty soldiers were compelled to endure their tortures as best they could."

Malvern Hill:

Interestingly, Lt. Col. Ripley makes no mention of his Medal of Honor role in this battle. See "Rutland in the Civil War – Part 1" for a description of Ripley's Medal of Honor award.

This was an important victory for the Union. It was one of the rare cases where a superior position had been taken by the Union troops, and it was decisive.

(Had the Confederates' success against the retreating Union troops continued, and the Army of the Potomac rendered ineffective, Lee very well would have had greater success in his Northern Virginia Campaign the following year, as Gen. Stonewall Jackson's successes against the Army of the Shenandoah had made the taking of Washington by the Confederates a possibility.)

As it was, the Peninsula Campaign was a victory for the rebels, as the Union failed in its objective to take Richmond. However, the strengths of the armies were relatively unchanged, and the Confederates actually lost more men than did the Union during the campaign.)

Commanding Officers

What did the men of Company F think of the leadership of the Army of the Potomac? Lt. Col. Ripley, as a company commander, was in a good position to sense the feelings of the men toward the senior commanders. With the benefit of time (Ripley's work was published more than 15 years after the end of the War), he offers comments on those commanders, that are based on his assessments of the opinions of the men. (Lt. Col. Ripley left the service due to injuries after the battle of Malvern Hill, when Gen. McClellan was still commanding the Army of the Potomac. Ripley's comments on other commanders are therefore hearsay, but are still valuable to us.)

McClellan:

Ripley has high praise for McClellan, although history has tended to judge McClellan harshly. "Gen. McClellan was relieved from the command and Gen. Burnside appointed to that position. The army accepted the change like soldiers, but with a deep sense of regret. The vast mass of the rank and file honored and trusted Gen. McClellan as few generals in history have been trusted by their followers. He was personally popular among the men, but below and behind this feeling was the belief that in many respects Gen. McClellan had not been quite fairly treated by some of those who ought to have been his warm and ardent supporters. They felt that political influences, which had but little hold upon the soldiers in the field, had been at work to the personal disadvantage of their loved commander, and to the disadvantage of the army and the cause of the Union as well."

Burnside:

The men had "lost confidence" in Burnside. After McClellan had been judged by those outside the ranks as too hesitant, Burnside felt

compelled to fight at all costs. Says Ripley, upon the replacement of Burnside by Hooker: "They (the soldiers) had lost confidence in his ability to command so large an army in the presence of so astute a commander as Lee."

Hooker

On Meade relieving Hooker: "The army parted with Hooker without very much regret. They recognized his wonderful fighting qualities as a division or corps commander, and he was personally popular, but they had never quite forgiven him for Chancellorsville, where he took his army, beaten and well nigh crushed, back from an enemy numerically weaker than his own, while he had yet nearly forty thousand soldiers who had not been engaged in the action, and hardly under fire."

Meade and Grant

Ripley offers no direct comment on the feelings of the men toward these commanders. He recognized (as does history) that Meade's "dilatatory" pursuit of Lee after Gettysburg was probably harmful in that it wasted opportunities.

Grant is observed by Ripley as one who would not back down and who therefore earned the respect of his men and the opposing General Lee. Ripley also astutely observes that Grant, by his own words ("I propose to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer."), was sometimes forced to engage the enemy when other means may have been more advantageous.

Stories from Company F

The following are a sampling of the anecdotes and stories provided by Lt. Col. Ripley.

Sharpshooter's duel -- Union and Confederate Sharpshooters face off.... "One spot was marked as the hiding place of a particularly obnoxious and skillful rifleman, and to him Private Ide of Co. E of New Hampshire, who occupied a commanding position near the corner of an outhouse, devoted himself. Ide was one of the few men who still carried his telescopic target rifle. Several shots were exchanged between these men, and it began to take the form of a personal affair and was watched with the keenest interest by those not otherwise engaged, but fortune first smiled on the rebel, and Ide fell dead, shot through the forehead while raising his rifle to aim. His fall was seen by the enemy, who raised a shout of exultation. It was short, however, for an officer, taking the

loaded rifle from the dead man's hand, and watching his opportunity through the strong telescope, soon saw the triumphant rebel, made bold by his success, raise himself into view; it was a fatal exposure and he fell apparently dead."

(In Ripley's account, the Union officer who fired the deadly shot is unnamed; in Benedict's account, the officer is identified — none other than Lt. Col. Ripley.)

A chance encounter off the battlefield....."In this affair a man from another company came suddenly face to face with an armed rebel at very short range; each, as it subsequently appeared, had but one cartridge and that was in his gun. Each raised his rifle at the first sight of the other and the reports were simultaneous. Both missed—the rebel bullet struck a tree so close to the sharp shooter's face that the flying fragments of bark drew blood; the Union bullet passed through the breast of the rebel's coat, cutting in two in its passage a small mirror in his breast pocket. They were now upon equal terms but each supposed himself at the disadvantage. Yankee cheek was too much, however, for the innocent Johnnie, for the sharp shooter, with great show of reloading his rifle, advanced on the rebel demanding his surrender. He threw down his gun with bad grace, saying as he did so: 'If I had another cartridge I would never surrender.' 'All right, Johnnie,' said the Yankee, 'if I had another you may be sure I would not ask you to surrender.' But Johnnie came in a prisoner."

Sometimes, a truce would be arranged between the sides. Upon termination of the truce, the sides would resume their hostile pursuits....."On one occasion a rebel rifleman was slow to respond to the warning—in fact he appeared to think himself out of sight; while all others hurried to their posts he alone sat (quietly blowing his hot coffee and munching his hard-tack). It so happened, however, that he was in plain sight of a sharp shooter less bloodthirsty than some others, who thought it only fair to give him one more warning, therefore he called out, "I say, Johnny, time is up, get into your hole." "All right," responded the cool rebel still blowing away at his hot cup. "Just hold that cup still," said the sharp shooter, "and I will show you whether it is all right or not." By this time the fellow began to suspect that he was indeed visible, and holding his cup still for an instant while he looked up, he afforded the Union marksman the opportunity he was waiting for. A rapid sight and the sharp's bullet knocked the coffee cup far out of its owner's reach and left it in such a condition that it could never serve a useful purpose again. The surprised rebel made haste to get under cover, pursued by the laughter and jeers of his own comrades as well as those of the sharp shooters. Thus men played practical jokes on each other at one moment, and the next were seeking to do each other mortal harm."

Summary

Lt. Col. Ripley spends some time at the end of his account tallying the numbers for Company F. This is a way of paying homage to the men who gave so much and fought so bravely.

(The original company included 100 enlisted men and 3 officers. During the war, additional enlistees brought the total number of enlisted men and officers who served to 177. There were 13 men reassigned initially to bring the complement of men down to the authorized number.)

32 men were killed on the battlefield or subsequently died of injuries or incarceration.

45 men were wounded, and returned to serve in the company.

6 of the men who were injured and returned did so twice.

Some of the 45 were subsequently killed or died of wounds received.

The final tribute paid to the company was by Gen De Trobriand, the Division Commander, and is presented by Lt. Col. Ripley as a fitting postscript to his account.

Headquarters, 3d Div. 2d Army Corps, February 16, 1865

GENERAL ORDER NO. 12.

"The United States Sharp Shooters, including the first and second consolidated battalions, being about to be broken up as a distinct organization in compliance with orders from the War Department, the brigadier general commanding the division will not take leave of them without acknowledging their good and efficient service during about three years in the field. The United States Sharp Shooters leave behind them a glorious record in the Army of the Potomac since the first operations against Yorktown in 1862 up to Hatcher's Run, and few are the battles or engagements where they did not make their mark. The brigadier general who had them under his command during most of the campaigns of 1863 and 1864, would be the last to forget their brave deeds during that period, and he feels assured that in the different organizations to which they may belong severally, officers and men will show themselves worthy of their old reputation; with them the past will answer for the future."

By command of Brig. Gen. R. De Trobriand

W.K. Driver, A.A.G

Conclusion

The Sharpshooters of the Union Army during the Civil War were extremely effective units in the field, created from an innovative concept for organization of specialized fighting forces.

The accomplishments of the Sharpshooters are celebrated at all levels of the union: national, state and local.

The Rutland Historical Society joins in honoring the men who fought with the Sharpshooters and, in too many cases, gave their lives. This Quarterly is an attempt by RHS to keep the memory of these men alive, and to tell the story of how Rutlanders once again answered the call of duty.

This is the third Civil War Quarterly to be published during the 4-year commemoration period. The Rutland Historical Society via the Quarterlies will continue to present relevant and timely articles, and will continue to expand the online information sources for Civil War related topics.

Sources

Sources for this quarterly are:

William Y. W. Ripley, "A History of Company F – First United States Sharpshooters 1861 to 1865" (Rutland, VT: Tuttle and Company Printers, Inc., 1883). Also known as "Vermont Riflemen in the War for the Union".

Benedict, George Grenville. "Vermont in the Civil War" (Burlington VT: Free Press Association, 1888)

Vermont in the Civil War website: www.vermontcivilwar.org

Berdan Sharpshooters website: www.berdansharpshooters.com

Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers, during the War of the Rebellion 1861 -1866, Theodore S. Peck, Adjutant General

The Rutland Herald

The 2012 Expo exhibit materials provided a great deal of the information herein. Thanks to the Project Team: George Bradley, Rosemary Bradley, Jim Davidson, Cliff Giffin, Angela Hinchey, Pam Johnson, Bill Powers.

For Further Reading

A number of Rutland-related Civil War books can be found on the free Internet Archive. Go to “archive.org”, select “text” and place the book title in the search box at the top. You may read the book on-line or you may also download the complete book in a few minutes. It is all FREE.

Here are six (6) titles that are available:

1. Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers
2. Vermont in the Civil War (2 Volumes) –G.G. Benedict
3. Vermont Riflemen in the War for the Union – William Y. W. Ripley
4. History of Rutland County, Vermont – Smith & Rann
5. The Vermont Brigade in the Shenandoah Valley – Aldace F. Walker
6. Narrative of the Service of the Officers and Enlisted men of the 7th Regiment of Vermont – William Holbrook

Rutland Historical Society Quarterlies related to the Civil War are available on our web site (rutlandhistory.com). These include the following titles:

Vol. X	No. 2 Rutland Light Guards
Vol. XXII	No. 2 Rutland Blacks in the Civil War
Vol. XXIII	No. 3 Horace Henry Baxter
Vol. XXIV	No. 2 John T. Kelly –Civil War Diary
Vol. XXV	No. 2 General Wheelock G. Veazey
Vol. XXVIII	No. 1 Civil War Diary of Charles B. Mead
Vol. 32	No. 1 Final Civil War Diary of Charles Mead
Vol. 41	No. 2 Rutland in the Civil War (Part 1)
Vol. 41	No. 3 Rutland in the Civil War (Part 2)

The following quarterly features the writings of Charles B. Mead:

Vol. XXVII No. 1 Charles B. Mead: A Young Man of Rare Promise



Sharpshooters at the ready